

**The Report of the  
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**American Leadership Academy  
898 West 1100 South  
Spanish Fork, Utah 84660**

**March 25-26, 2008**



**Utah State Office of Education  
250 East 500 South  
P.O. Box 144200  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200**

**THE REPORT OF THE  
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**American Leadership Academy  
898 West 1100 South  
Spanish Fork, UT 84660**

**March 25-26, 2008**

**UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

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## **FOREWORD**

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, March 25-26, 2008, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of American Leadership Academy is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Director Robert Muhlestein is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at American Leadership Academy, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at American Leadership Academy.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D.  
State Superintendent  
of Public Instruction

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7/25/2007

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# AMERICAN LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

## ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

### School Administration

Robert Muhlstein ..... Director/Superintendent  
Kalin Hall.....Asst. Director/Secondary Principal  
Kenna Marrelli.....Asst. Director/Secondary Principal

### Counseling

Sam Prestwich..... Director/Counseling  
June Jensen..... Intern/Counselor  
Meghan Merideth..... Intern/Counselor

### Library/Media

Karen R. Finley ..... Librarian

### Support Staff

Judy Brunson ..... Administrative Assistant  
Jennifer Fulton ..... Administrative Assistant  
Susan Jensen ..... Secretary  
McKel Marrelli ..... Secretary  
Tracy Mecham ..... Secretary  
Vickie Peterson ..... Registrar, SIS  
Hannah Peterson ..... Records, SIS  
Kacie Scott ..... School Registered Nurse  
Annette Murphy ..... Student Health Advisor  
Pamela Pappas ..... EDNET, Attendance Secretary  
Kimber Tidwell ..... Human Resources  
C. Denise Cardoza ..... Student Academic Advisor-Para Professional  
Amberlee Cloward ..... Student Academic Advisor-Para Professional  
Jeff Nyman ..... I.T. Coordinator  
Johnny Williams ..... Technology  
Armanda Law ..... Administrative Assistant, Special Education  
Jayne Barrus ..... Special Education Aide, High School; Office Aide  
Brandon Tate ..... Head Custodian/Maintenance  
Brad Balzly ..... Custodial Maintenance

Jesus Domingez .....	Custodial Maintenance
Rita Lynn Allred .....	Bus Driver, Library Aide
Kassandra Latham.....	Food Service Coordinator
Melissa Muhlstein.....	Food Service Aide

### **Faculty**

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Bernice Cooper	Vikki Masters	Kirsten Smith
Julie Davis	Douglas Meek	C. Joann Spence
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Sandy Barker	Jarom Murphy	Adam Slee
Sonja Damon	Kristal Murphy	Kami Telford
Brenden Haywood	Sarah Olsen	Alex Thorson



# **AMERICAN LEADERSHIP ACADEMY**

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of American Leadership Academy (ALA) is to empower families and support students in grades K-12 to meet and exceed rigorous academic standards, promote life-long learning skills, and to advocate our belief that parental involvement and partnership is critical to student success. ALA is committed to providing all students with a challenging, innovative, and results-oriented education through a quality, unique method of educational reform which emphasizes academic excellence, physical well-being, character development, with accountability and respect for the individual.

## **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

American Leadership Academy believes it is important to instill in each student, consistent with their age and grade level, an educational foundation consisting of the following:

- The ability to read, write legibly, and spell correctly.
- The ability to think analytically, reason, compute and apply in problem solving.
- The ability to express thoughts in precise, grammatically correct sentences and phrases.
- The ability to experience a sense of patriotism through a study of U.S. and World History and geography and to develop reverence for the sacrifice of historical figures who exemplified virtue and character.
- The ability to applying the scientific method in understanding basic concepts of earthly, biological, chemical, and physical science.
- The ability to appreciate expressions in the fine and visual arts.
- The ability to recognize the importance of overall good health and physical development and to know how to maintain a healthy, active lifestyle.
- The ability to develop a sense of self-worth through personal achievement, a willingness to sacrifice self, and service.
- The ability to develop a strong moral character through working to master the character traits of personal honesty, moral cleanliness, virtuous living, love of others, and love of self.
- The ability to realize that students are responsible and accountable for both their actions and behavior.

## **DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)**

1. Responsible Citizenship to demonstrate individual initiative and personal responsibility, practice a healthy lifestyle, and understand and help promote the democratic principles of freedom, justice, and equality.
2. An Effective Communicator who uses appropriate methods of communication, responds appropriately to communication, reads and comprehends well, and utilizes recognized writing skills.
3. A Lifelong Learner who initiates his or her own learning and growth, demonstrates worthwhile learning habits, develops a plan for post-secondary pursuits, and interacts effectively with adults and peers.

Date of Visit: March 26-27, 2008

## **MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

Ted P. Lovato, Accreditation Consultant, Utah State Office of Education,  
Northwest Association of Accredited Schools, Visiting Team Chairperson

Susan Dyer, Teacher, Kearns High School, Granite School District

Judy Ferris, Principal, Navigator Pointe Academy, Charter School

Millicent Jacobson, Principal, Oxford Academy, Private School

Edy McGee, Principal, Butler Elementary School, Jordan School District

John Taggart, Specialist, Charter Schools Office, Utah State Office of Education

# **VISITING TEAM REPORT**

## **AMERICAN LEADERSHIP ACADEMY**

### **CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE**

American Leadership Academy is a public charter school located in the pleasant suburb of Spanish Fork, Utah. The school serves 1,425 students in grades K-12 on one campus, with full academic, drama, speech, band, orchestra, choir, and sports programs. The school is a member of the Utah High School Activities Association, and is currently in the 2A classification. The school also offers secondary students a leadership program to help students learn important principles of leadership in a less structured, more informal educational setting.

American Leadership Academy is considered very large for a charter school, but still has the feel of a small school where a child can be known for his/her individual strengths and excel in his/her areas of interest.

a) *What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?*

The Visiting Team found that the profile showed that American Leadership Academy teachers are very positive and enthusiastic about their role in the education of students. Teachers know their subject matter, and most agree they are well organized. More than half of the teachers felt the administration is accessible to them. Teacher surveys showed that more parents needed to participate in parent-teacher conferences, and that students could show more pride in their school. The Visiting Team found that most American Leadership Academy students interviewed do have a great amount of pride in their school.

According to the ISQ (Indicators of School Quality) survey results, parents are very happy that their students attend American Leadership Academy. They expressed great satisfaction with the job teachers were doing. Two-thirds to three-fourths felt administrators were accessible and promoted innovative teaching and learning.

Students felt that parents and teachers were very supportive of their education. Students feel the culture of the school promotes positive behavior and overall learning. For the most part, students feel satisfied with the quality of education at American Leadership Academy.

The self-study profile showed that the school has experienced many “growing pains,” but the school’s stakeholders feel that much has been learned from the experiences and the school is on its way to becoming an outstanding school.

- b) *What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?*

The school leadership expressed an interest in possibly seeking accreditation status for the elementary school; much work needs to be done if this is to be accomplished in the next six-year cycle. The profile would need to contain viable base-line data and other key information if the school chooses to be accredited as a K-12 school.

In addition, American Leadership Academy works to continuously update all pertinent data in the self-study document. The Visiting Team discovered that the data in the current self-study was in great need of updating.

- c) *To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?*

Because American Leadership Academy is a three-year-old school, the school's current strengths and limitations are in a state of flux. The administration reported that the self-study was done approximately a year before the Visiting Team came. In conversations with the administration, it became clear to the Visiting Team that the school's strengths and limitations had changed since American Leadership Academy did its self-study.

**Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

- American Leadership Academy should investigate and identify efforts to sustain the commitment to continuous improvement. The school should provide strong leadership so teachers do not become “side-tracked” (according to the self-study document) on issues unrelated to the school's goals for improvement.
- The school should investigate ways to improve the administration's efforts regarding professional development opportunities for teachers and staff.
- The school should investigate opportunities that are currently available for the development of a full-service school-counseling program which meets Utah state standards.

## CHAPTER 2: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS

### **Mission, Beliefs and Desired Results for Student Learning (DRSLs):**

- a) *To what degree were the school's mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs developed and/or revised collaboratively by the school community to define a compelling purpose and vision for the school and to support student achievement?*

As a charter school, American Leadership Academy's mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs have been directly derived from the school's charter. There has been a great amount of community involvement in the development of the mission, beliefs, and DRSLs of American Leadership Academy. All school personnel were hired knowing upfront what the mission, beliefs, and DRSLs are for the school and what the school community expects. Through individual and group visits with school administration, faculty, students, and parents, it was evident the school's mission, beliefs, and DRSLs are being actualized in the school's policies, practices, and, most importantly, the lives of the students. Teachers and students related experiences regarding students who have come to the school and become more responsible citizens, and demonstrating the traits of lifelong learners. Members of the Visiting Team were constantly commenting on the behavior and conduct of the students as responsible citizens and their demonstration of lifelong learner traits.

- b) *To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's DRSLs?*

The DRSLs were pulled directly from the school's mission statement and core beliefs, providing for DRSLs that are very closely aligned with the mission and beliefs of the school's founders and a staff hired to focus on those beliefs.

- c) *Describe the indicators (measures) that have been developed to assess the school's progress in assessing the DRSLs.*

The school selected three DRSLs, with three to four indicators for each DRSL. The DRSLs and indicators are outlined as follows:

1. Responsible Citizen
  - a. Demonstrates individual initiative and personal responsibility.
  - b. Practices a healthy lifestyle.
  - c. Understands and helps promote the democratic principles of freedom, justice, and equality.

2. An Effective Communicator
  - a. Uses appropriate methods of communication.
  - b. Responds appropriately to communication.
  - c. Reads and comprehends well.
  - d. Utilizes recognized writing skills.
3. A Lifelong Learner
  - a. Initiates his or her own learning and growth.
  - b. Demonstrates worthwhile learning habits.
  - c. Develops a plan for post-secondary pursuits.
  - d. Interacts effectively with adults and peers.

As evidenced by the indicators listed, formal assessment of progress toward the DRSLs is limited. While student achievement was discussed during numerous meetings and conversations with various stakeholders and considered an important student outcome, the desired results for student learning go beyond student achievement on any particular instrument. The mission of the school and the DRSLs are more focused on what students become through their student achievement and their experience with the school's community and culture. These broad desired outcomes are set up for assessment based on stakeholder observations of students' character.

The Visiting Team believes that valid and measurable assessments need to play a stronger role to assess the school's progress in assessing the DRSLs.

- d) *To what extent do the school's mission, beliefs, and DRSLs guide the procedures, policies and decisions of the school, and appear evident in the culture of the school?*

First and foremost, the Visiting Team recognized the mission, beliefs, and DRSLs evident in the lives of the students themselves as they described their experiences with the school and its community and culture, and in the way they described changes within themselves after enrolling at American Leadership Academy. As students described their experiences and answered questions posed by Visiting Team members to student groups and individual students, several traits of lifelong learners and responsible citizens were evident. School policy requires teachers to be available to assist individual students both before and after school. Conversations with and observations of teachers confirmed an environment where students felt comfortable asking questions and making comments suggestive of students acquiring the traits of lifelong learners and responsible citizens. The compilation of observations and conversations suggest a school where the mission, beliefs, and DRSLs are deeply evident in the school's culture and community.

## **Curriculum:**

- a) *To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards, the Utah Core Curriculum, reflecting the Utah Life Skills: A Guide to Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Success?*

The American Leadership Academy staff and curriculum directors are aware of the need to meet both the Utah State and national Core Curriculum standards. As this three-year school has evolved, the faculty has kept these goals in mind while have creating, testing, and evaluating the school's emerging curricula.

It is evident American Leadership Academy is working toward curriculum improvement from the action plans the school has listed.

**Action Plan # 1:** Improve Leadership Education curriculum.

**Action Plan # 2:** Train teachers in and implement new writing curriculum "The Six Traits Writing Program."

**Action Plan # 3:** Develop curriculum for a new "Three-Track Educational Instruction Program."

American Leadership Academy is also working to create cross-curriculum correlation and stronger collaborative teams. Changes in the staff and administration have made this goal more difficult to reach, but it appears as though fewer personnel changes are occurring.

American Leadership Academy has also chosen to try to have consistent lesson content in each grade level or subject, and is also trying to coordinate between grade levels to ensure proper preparation for subsequent years. This ambitious goal is challenging, but its accomplishment is underway.

It should also be noted that American Leadership Academy is putting impressive technology in place to support teacher instruction. Some teachers are currently using this support, while others need some additional training.

In summary, this emerging school has set the foundation for an excellent curriculum base. With time and continued commitment, it is apparent that American Leadership Academy will become known for its exemplary academics.

- b) *To what extent does the curriculum engage **all** students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking skills?*

In some courses/classrooms where the curriculum was more developed, this type of more engaging instruction was evident. Lessons of this quality involved specifically spelling out what the instructor wanted the students to learn, brief lectures with note taking, video streaming combined with overhead maps (good use of technology), students writing about what they had just learned, group



discussion, and rapid-fire oral quiz and answer to ensure mastery. This is in contrast to some of the newer courses, without a fully developed curriculum, that consist of lecture for the entire hour.

It will be interesting to see how this school develops into its technological advantages in the future. It will also be interesting to observe the expected curriculum improvements.

- c) *To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's DRSLs?*

American Leadership Academy's DRSLs are directly addressed through its leadership program. The curriculum for this program has been a challenge to create; American Leadership Academy has found some projects successful, and others ineffective. Total teacher buy-in was not evident to the Visiting Team.

As mentioned previously, American Leadership Academy's number one action plan is to improve the curriculum in this leadership program. When American Leadership Academy finishes creating this curriculum and designing assessments to demonstrate student mastery, these DRSLs will be better addressed.

As written previously, American Leadership Academy has faced, and will continue to face, the challenge of teacher buy-in for this program. However, the name of this school is American **Leadership** Academy, so teacher buy-in will be essential. Once the staff members begin to work together more, they will be able to develop a more effective map of the leadership program's curriculum.

- d) *How does the staff use assessments to drive curriculum to ensure that **all** students can reach the intended learning outcomes?*

Most curriculum assessments used are currently informal. American Leadership Academy is getting ready to be able to administer the CRTs, UBSCT, and other state and national assessments. Until the curriculum is fully designed, formal assessments will be difficult to develop. American Leadership Academy is placing a priority on curriculum standardization and creation. Once this task has been completed, assessments will be easier to develop and be more valid. The self-study document reveals that much work is needed in this critical area.

### **Instruction:**

- a) *To what extent do teachers use a variety of instructional strategies to enhance student learning?*

Due to the lack of a strong teacher in-service program, there seems to be a wide variety of teaching strategies. Some teachers lecture with very little interaction,

while others have students very engaged in a variety of ways, from group work to individual students engaging the entire class in an invigorating and stimulating environment.

The Visiting Team found many hardworking and dedicated teachers on the American Leadership Academy staff, and was impressed with the efforts expended on behalf of special education students.

- b) *To what extent have the school and the staff developed strategies for instruction that build the capacity for explicitly teaching the identified DRSL in every classroom?*

There is evidence that the school faculty is using the DRSLs to drive instruction, but this may not be happening on a wholesale basis. For many of the staff members, the DRSLs are relatively new in their current format; thus, staff members are still improving their implementation of the DRSLs into the curriculum and their processes of assessment on a school-wide basis.

There is generally strong student buy-in and, as this new school evolves, the DRSLs should become institutionalized.

- c) *To what extent is the school's professional development program guided by identified instructional needs, and how does it provide opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional strategies that support student learning?*

The Visiting Team discovered, in studying the self-study document and talking with many members of the school community, that the administration needs to improve its professional development program. In addition, there is a need to increase the instructional resources available, even though great strides have been made since the school opened.

- d) *To what extent are teachers proficient in their content area, knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches, and reflective on their own practices?*

The teachers of American Leadership Academy are a great asset to the total school. There is evidence of collaboration and sharing and assisting one another when needed. The teaching staff is relatively young, competent, and enthusiastic, and it is obvious that the staff members bring excitement to the school. The veteran teachers are strong, highly competent, and a good resource for the younger staff members.

The focus group members for quality instructional design sought student feedback, which revealed a higher-than-average response to the overall quality of teacher proficiency in their respective areas of instruction.

- e) *To what extent does the school effectively implement a well-defined plan for the integration of technology into its curriculum, instruction, and assessments?*

The school leadership has done a good job of providing impressive technology, with available resources, in supporting teacher instruction. Some teachers are using this support, while others need additional training.

**Assessment:**

- a) *To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments with performance standards based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?*

The Visiting Team found American Leadership Academy lacking a school-wide effort to create a consensus-building process, but feels that educators are desirous of improving ways to facilitate a program, based on student data, to develop school-wide assessment practices to improve instruction and student academic growth. Teachers feel there needs to be more involvement by other stakeholders, such as students, parents, and professional peers, in this important endeavor. More effort is needed to utilize the latest educational research to further define the school's vision, beliefs, mission, and goals as they relate to student assessment.

The Visiting Team found that some teachers do use rubrics that are made available to students and parents before the assignment is assessed. This facilitates a better understanding of what will be assessed and the level of quality that is expected.

- b) *To what extent does the school have a process to fairly and equitably assess school-wide and individual progress in achieving academic expectations?*

The teachers, in their self-study document, reveal there are areas of needed improvement. More time needs to be spent by faculty members providing sample assessment work showing a range of responses. There is a need for more faculty members allowing students to see more often what exemplary responses/solutions look like so that students have a model to emulate.

Rubrics, when used, need to be thoroughly explained to students so they have a clear understanding of expectations. In addition, a stronger connection needs to be made by faculty members between syllabi provided to students/parents, the Utah State Core (where applicable), and the design of assessments. Also, there is a need for variation in assessment types needing improvement. As teachers have written, "students learn in different ways, and communicate understanding in different ways." Faculty members must continue to keep this in mind as assessments are

designed, so as not to always write assessments favoring one learning or communication style. This is indeed commendable.

- c) *To what extent does the professional staff use data to assess the success of the school in achieving its academic expectations?*

American Leadership Academy teachers reveal, in the self-study document, that most of their assessment methods are aligned with the instructional approach used in the classroom. Although teachers responded that there were other assessment methods they would use if not for cost or other issues, the types of assessments that they do use are cost effective. Teachers are using assessment methods that accurately measure the objectives for the course. Teachers, on the whole, feel they are giving assignments and reviews that accurately represent what will be expected of the students on tests and quizzes.

- d) *To what extent does the school's professional development program allow for opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing a broad range of student assessment strategies?*

Teachers admitted there is a need for training to recognize that assessments should only be used for the stated purpose of the assessment, and that any other interpretations should be ignored. Teacher and peer reviews need to be implemented into assessment writing and results need to be more consistent. This should be done with the goal of having others search assessments for bias, poor questions, unfair assessments, or spurious assessment items.

The Director stated there needs to be a stronger effort in planning effective teacher in-service.

- e) *To what extent is there organizational agreement on the use of a school-wide scoring tool to assess the identified DRSL?*

It appears, on reviewing the three action plans, that assessment is based on "successful completion" of the various action steps, and one would assume that the organizational agreement on the use of a school-wide scoring tool will evolve as a matter of course. The Visiting Team felt that "successful completion" must be clear, concise, and measurable. In addition, the Visiting Team believes the action plan must clearly identify specific individuals as the person(s) responsible for assessing and completing the desired action plan.

### CHAPTER 3: NAAS SUPPORT STANDARDS

#### **Leadership and Organization:**

- a) *To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate that actively supports teaching and learning?*

The school leadership promotes quality instruction and supports teaching and learning in the following ways:

1. The American Leadership Academy governing board has made the financial commitment to establish hiring practices that will ensure excellent teachers are attracted to teach at American Leadership Academy.
2. The American Leadership Academy governing board has made the financial commitment to provide classroom/students with the curriculum materials and tools necessary to teach their selected programs. This was an initial concern of teachers that seems to have been corrected.
3. The American Leadership Academy administration has responded to teacher feedback regarding the need for materials and supplies most needed to support instructional goals and student achievement across subject areas.

- b) *To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative to monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness?*

School leadership is working to improve its instructional effectiveness by:

1. Developing internal controls to monitor achievement of individual students (tracking parent contacts/conferences).
2. Providing parent access to student achievement through SIS.
3. Establishing systematic observations/evaluations/feedback mechanisms for the instructional staff.
4. Providing additional data (CRT and ITBS) to assess the effectiveness of instruction and student achievement. This area should improve as this new school evolves.

- c) *To what extent does the leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and allocation and use of resources at the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment which aligns with the school goals, DRSLs, and school improvement?*

There is a high level of school leadership commitment to student achievement, as evidenced by:

1. The support of the governing board, and an administration that is student focused and aligns its DRSLs and charter goals with the daily implementation of its educational program.

2. The physical proof that resources have been procured and utilized to maximize a safe, effective learning environment (security system, behavior management policies and plans, classroom layout, furnishings, teacher materials, technological resources, student textbooks, materials, etc.).
- d) *To what extent does the school leadership empower the entire school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning through meaningful roles in the decision-making process?*

The school leadership is striving to improve school-wide contributions to improved student achievement by:

1. Administrators have acknowledged that the self-study provided an effective means for staff/administration communication and collaboration regarding student achievement.
  2. Administrators have assistants in the high school and middle school who assist in working collaboratively with staff members in departments and teams.
  3. The school administration has plans to systematize the organization and feedback mechanism of the departmental and team meetings to more consistently increase commitment and participation in making decisions that affect student achievement.
- e) *To what extent has the school established a formal system through which each student has an adult staff member who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning?*
1. The school is in the process of implementing a comprehensive guidance program.
  2. An SEOP policy and plan has been established and implemented.

### **School Services:**

This standard is dealt with in the school's NAAS Annual Report, which requires specific responses and information regarding student support services, guidance services, health services, library information services, special education services, and family and community services.

### **Facilities and Finances:**

This standard is addressed in the school's annual report to NAAS, which requires specific responses regarding the physical plant, finances, audit of school records, advertising, etc.

## CHAPTER 4: NAAS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STANDARD

### **Culture of Continual Improvement:**

- a) *To what extent has the school developed and implemented a comprehensive school improvement plan using Collaborating for Student Achievement, the Utah accreditation/school improvement process that is reviewed and revised on an ongoing basis?*

The American Leadership Academy staff and administration have developed and implemented a school improvement plan and have utilized *Collaborating for Student Achievement*. The school is still in the infancy stage, and the Visiting Team feels the staff is dedicated to continuing a strong course of school improvement. In addition, there is strong student buy-in.

- b) *To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through an aligned and ongoing professional development plan focused on the school's goals for improvement?*

American Leadership Academy states in the self-study document that “the school isn't quite to a fully functioning level, but does provide support for school improvement initiatives and professional development through faculty meetings, department meetings and development programs. There is some administrative observation in classrooms. Teachers attend some off-site training.” It became apparent to the Visiting Team that much more collaboration and professional staff development is still needed. All teachers need to be involved.

The self-study indicates that “staff development is a priority.” The Director also stated this in a focus group(s) meeting with all members of the Visiting Team.

- c) *To what extent is the new/revised school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up and is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?*

The school-wide action plan is adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up, but the Visiting Team is concerned that results be measurable. Future on-site visits will seek an answer to that important question. The Visiting Team found that staff members feel the effort to sustain the commitment to continuous improvement is often “side-tracked on issues unrelated to the school's goals for improvement” (as written in the self-study document). The Visiting Team believes that the leadership must provide information to all staff members so that they can take advantage of opportunities for improvement, as many are unaware of requirements and opportunities available to them.

- d) *To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?*

One must realize that American Leadership Academy is still in its early developmental stages, since it has yet to reach the completion of its third year of operation. The Visiting Team was impressed with the overall progress that such a young institution has accomplished in the time it has been in operation. This is attributable to the many dedicated and hardworking individuals who see “the vision” of a good school—perhaps a great school—in the future. The Visiting Team was aware of the honesty of the administration and staff in recognizing their limitations, but believes a concerted effort for continuous improvement is a work in progress.

Students interviewed were a strong testament to what the school believes and to what point it wants to evolve. Students, on the whole, love their school and the strong values it represents to them.

## **CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING**

- a) *To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?*

The Visiting Team was impressed by the sense of community that exists among the staff and students. The American Leadership Academy is dedicated to promoting positive and productive relationships among students, teachers, and administrators. The staff shows great sensitivity to the developmental needs of the students, and is committed to helping students. For example, staff members have formed an exemplary Special Education Department to serve the 12 percent of their students who qualify for these services. Additionally, because of the school’s unique physical facilities, students are easily accommodated if they need advanced courses. Also, elementary students attend fine arts events sponsored by the secondary school. The Visiting Team recommends that the staff continue its collaborative efforts within departments and with the three educational levels it serves.

Conversations of the Visiting Team with students, parents, and staff members revealed that American Leadership Academy has created a strong sense of community. Parents expressed appreciation for the communication between teachers and students. Students and staff members alike love this school for reasons as diverse as the small classes and the way teachers react with each other.



- b) *To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?*

The Visiting Team commends American Leadership Academy for the work done in this area. The school is working constantly to improve communication with the community. The staff reaches out to parents and families to engage them as partners in the learning process through a variety of programs: Parent organization, newsletters, fine arts performances, sports events, community service, booster organizations, and fundraisers. Communication is enhanced by American Leadership Academy's use of Eagle Cards and phone calls to let parents know of the positive things their children are doing.

The school community is involved in many of the school's projects. For example, the school facility is available for community use. All levels of the school were involved in a recent musical production, thus involving and extending the school community. American Leadership Academy also performs with other schools and for community groups. American Leadership Academy has an athletics program (UHSAA members) that is used for community building, as parents and school staff work collaboratively in fundraising.

Furthermore, American Leadership Academy students have an opportunity to job shadow in the community. The school networks with a local university to provide leadership training for its student body officers. Their networks include a service component. During Winterum, individual groups provided service to various organizations in the community. There is also a cross-age tutoring program at American Leadership Academy.

- c) *To what extent has the school engaged the school community in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?*

The Visiting Team commends American Leadership Academy for the candor it displayed in performing the self-study, even though some parts of the self-study were in need of updating. Using the rubrics prepared by the National Study of School Evaluation, American Leadership Academy formed focus groups to analyze its instructional and organizational effectiveness. Each focus group had adequate teacher, parent, and student representation. For each component of each focus group, American Leadership Academy scored itself and then provided documentation for the score.

Although the self-study included department analyses, the Visiting Team recommends that each department do a more thorough analysis by using the eleven Essential Questions as a framework. Additionally, examining each department's strengths and weaknesses will help focus American Leadership Academy on areas where the department can develop a plan for improvement.

The Visiting Team is confident that the administration and faculty of American Leadership Academy are committed to student learning and will continue to make strides in providing opportunities for all students to achieve.

- d) *How are results of school improvement identified, documented, used, and communicated to **all** stakeholders?*

American Leadership Academy tracks all data. At the end of the year, the data is charted to check on progress. The school uses SIS to track student behavior. Teachers and parents review student progress.

The school also places items about its progress in a community newspaper.

## **CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

### **Commendations:**

- The Visiting Team commends American Leadership Academy for its thorough and honest self-study.
- The Visiting Team commends American Leadership Academy for the competent, caring, and dedicated teachers currently employed by the school.
- The Visiting Team commends the American Leadership Academy Board of Directors, community, administration, and staff for the strong foundation that has been created and developed in building American Leadership Academy.
- The Visiting Team commends the American Leadership Academy administration, staff, and Board of Directors for establishing and creating an environment where students feel safe, supported, comfortable, and cared for.
- The Visiting Team commends the American Leadership Academy student body for its self-respect and respect for others.
- The Visiting Team commends American Leadership Academy for the excellent provisions made for its special education population.
- The Visiting Team commends American Leadership Academy for its campus design, which facilitates cross-age tutoring and opportunities for students to move to upper or lower levels.

- The Visiting Team commends American Leadership Academy for their improved commitment to using technology to support student learning and teacher instruction.
- The Visiting Team commends American Leadership Academy for establishing a strong community involvement and excellent parent communication.
- The Visiting Team commends the Board of Directors of American Leadership Academy for its fiscal commitment to small student-teacher ratios, paraprofessional support, and significant teacher compensation.

### **Recommendations:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that the American Leadership Academy Board of Directors, Director, and Assistant Directors work together in defining their respective roles of leadership in order to effectively lead American Leadership Academy into the future. Roles of both policymakers and administrators of policy must be clearly defined and honored.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the American Leadership Academy staff work collaboratively to design and implement effective in-service training in improving the overall scope and sequence of the Leadership Education curriculum, and that the curriculum be used by **all** teachers instructing the Leadership course.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the American Leadership Academy team work to continuously update all pertinent and useful data in the current and future self-study document(s).
- The Visiting Team recommends that American Leadership Academy continue to provide commitment to the development of a full-service counseling and guidance program that meets all the Utah state standards.
- The Visiting Team recommends that American Leadership Academy continue to develop its library/media facilities, increase the number of volumes, and improve services for students and teachers.
- The Visiting Team recommends that American Leadership Academy increase the collaboration within and between departments to align its teaching and assessments with the State Core Curriculum standards.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the American Leadership Academy administration use valid and reliable formative and summative evaluation tools in assessing all teaching staff, in order to improve overall instruction at American Leadership Academy.

- The Visiting Team recommends that the American Leadership Academy administration assess its professional development needs and devise ways to meet those needs.